TRAINING OF PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE MENTORS
– AN ACTION RESEARCH

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Abstract
The paper presents the partial results of a research made at the level of the Department for Teachers' Training (DDPD) within the University of Piteşti, named *Quality in Educational Mentoring* [CAMED], the 2007 competition, theme no. 3, code 1157, manager: Ph.D. teacher Liliana Ezechil. The project was accredited and financially supported by CNCSIS.
This paper presents essential aspects related to the optimization of pedagogical practice activities as a result of the introduction of mentoring teachers in a continuous training program prepared on well-substantiated bases from a scientific point of view.

Premises
In the context of institutional development measures adopted at the level of the Piteşti University, an own, complex and coherent strategy was adopted, regarding the optimization of the process related to the initial training of the didactic personnel – an activity managed by the Department for the Preparation of Didactic Personnel. Such strategy was performed through the inspired connection of the initial and continuous training of the didactic personnel in view of optimization of the didactic process quality at its different levels: pre-university education, university education.

Research stages:
I^{st} **Stage** – had an informative character and constituted the analytical stage, related to the knowledge of the newest purchases performed in the field of mentoring activities at a national and international level.

IInd **Stage** – *the (proper) research - action* was focused on the specific objectives: particular aspects of didactic mentoring at the level of the Piteşti University were highlighted; the analysis criteria and the quality standards which are relevant for the mentoring activity were prepared; the categories of competences definitive for the professional profile of the mentoring teachers were identified and behavioral descriptors related to such competence categories were prepared; a competence profile of the mentoring teacher – desirable for the students preparing to become teachers within DPPD of the Piteşti University was identified.

The IIIrd Stage – focused on the performance of educational products with a logistic character: strategic products and useful instruments in the process related to the performance of pedagogical practice activities.

Applied research methods: a combination between qualitative and quantitative methods, *i.e.* - focus group, questionnaire applied in a crossed manner on the two target groups (mentoring

teachers and students), the registration with the video camera of certain pedagogical practice activities, the behavior noticing grids, the statistic methods.

The focus group method: was useful for identifying perceptions, representations, attitudes... of some of the main actors involved in the mentoring activity of future teachers.

Stages in the focus group performance:
• establishment of discussion themes;
• establishment of the group structure;
• drafting of the discussion organization guide;
• establishment of questions;
• establishment of a calendar of meetings.

Focus group composition:
• one moderator;
• 4 methodicians;
• 4 mentors with a rich experience who also performed special programs organized by the British Council on the mentoring issue;
• 6 researchers in the CAMED group– university teachers with a basic specialization in the following disciplines: pedagogy, psychology, sociology, who also have a rich experience in the management of didactic mentoring activities.

Target products.

From all the products targeted through the mentioned research we shall select – in the context of this paper – those which are related to the continuous training of mentors, *i.e.*:

• *analysis criteria* related to the mentoring activity;
• *strategic products* (a coherent managerial conception on the performance of the practical activities within the program related to the initial training of teachers; the preparation of a program and calendar related to the performance of pedagogical practice activities – agreed by the main actors involved in the process related to the professional training of future teachers);
• necessary *instruments* in the process related to the performance of pedagogical practice activities (pedagogical practice notebook for students, the mentor's guide), a *competence profile of the mentoring teacher* corresponding to the real and immediate needs of the students training to become teachers at the DPPD of the Pitesti University, a *curriculum related to the training of mentoring teachers.*

Followed objectives in focus group performance [F.G.]:
• the establishment of certain criteria for the analysis of the behaviors which are relevant for the didactic mentoring activity ([**F.G.1.**]
• the preparation of quality standards for the activity performed by the mentoring teacher during the performance of the pedagogical practical internship [**F.G.2.**]
• the identification of certain categories of relevant competences for the roles exercised by the mentoring teacher in the relations established with the students over the performance of the pedagogical practical internship and the association of such competences with significant behavior descriptors [**F.G.3.**]
• the generation of the information necessary for the preparation of two questionnaires: *The questionnaire related to the identification of the perceptions of the mentoring teachers in the education system network on the mentoring activity* and for *The questionnaire identifying the perceptions of practicing students over the mentoring activity.* [**F.G.4.**]:

Research hypothesis

We suppose there is a relation between the *in situ* approach of the problematic related to the learning of professional behaviors of the didactic profession and the perceptions of the main actors involved in this process (mentors and practicing students).

Procedure.

For the achievement of the competence profile of the mentoring teacher, the following tools were used:

• The two questionnaires (*Questionnaire identifying the perceptions of mentoring teachers – collaborators of DPPD of the Piteşti University – on the mentoring activity* and *Questionnaire identifying the perceptions of practicing students within the DPPD of the Piteşti University on the mentoring activity*) which were applied in a crossed manner on the two lots of subjects: practicing students and mentoring teachers, being focused on the four categories of competences specified above (see also Ezechil, L., (coord.), (2009), *Ghidul mentorului*, Paralela 45 Publishing House, Piteşti, p. 43).

• The collection of other additional data by means of: modern registration techniques (the video camera), reportophone; sheets for noticing behaviors, with two entries for safe information and unsafe information (classic), which generated a series of useful hypotheses for shaping the competence profile of the mentor.

The pedagogical facts which are registered and mentioned, which are supposed by the mentoring activities, were interpreted from the perspective of intrinsic significances and from the perspective of the general research purpose.

The research was permanently re-dimensioned (from the data collection to the assumption of its transformative and applicative nature), as new analysis and statistic processing techniques were identified, for the purpose of operationalizing noticeable indicators helping in the transposition and objectivization of the dimensions of mentoring activities, noticed in: facts, aspects, behaviors, actions, manifestations.

Research results

For verifying the research hypothesis, the significance of the difference between the means obtained by mentors and practicing students (respectively, the subjects who answered the applied questionnaires) was established by calculating the value of the signification test (test t, Student). The results obtained by the group subject to investigation are summarized in table 1:

1. Mentoring students' perceptions on the competences of the pedagogical practice mentor		Mean	Std. Deviation	Signification	Std. Deviation	Mean		2. Students' perceptions on the competences of the pedagogical practice mentor
	Psycho-social competences	40.29	1.85	p<0,01	1.84	40.05	Psycho-social competences	
	Competences related to the management of future teachers' training process	40.85	1.82	P<0,01	1.76	40.81	Competences related to the management of future teachers' training process	
	Competences related to	31.01	2.28	p<0,01	2.29	30.45	Competences related to	

	the contextualization of the acquired theoretical preparation					the contextualization of the acquired theoretical preparation	
	Competences related to the counseling of future teachers	31.72	2.26	p<0,01	2.26	31.81	Competences related to the counseling of future teachers
Teachers' perceptions on the mentor's competence profile		17.59	1.77	p<0,01	1.52	17.21	Students' perceptions on the mentor's competence profile.

Table 1. Students' and mentoring teachers' perceptions on the competences of the pedagogical practice mentor

Correlations

		competente psihosociale studenti	competente psihosociale profesori	competente de management al procesului de formare a viitorilor profesori (st)	competente de management al procesului de formare a viitorilor profesori (pr)	competente de contextualizarea pregatirii teoretice dobandite (st)	competente de contextualizarea pregatirii teoretice dobandite (pr)	competente de consiliere a viitorilor profesori (st)	competente de consiliere a viitorilor profesori (pr)
competente psihosociale studenti	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.787**	.062	-.061	-.071	-.026	-.012	.064
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000	.423	.470	.362	.764	.879	.450
	N	168	141	168	141	168	141	168	141
competente psihosociale profesori	Pearson Correlation	.787**	1.000	-.003	-.102	-.130	.069	.020	.005
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000		.972	.228	.124	.417	.817	.955
	N	141	141	141	141	141	141	141	141
competente de management al procesului de formare a viitorilor profesori (st)	Pearson Correlation	.062	-.003	1.000	.728**	-.032	-.126	-.031	-.143
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.423	.972		.000	.684	.137	.691	.091
	N	168	141	168	141	168	141	168	141
competente de management al procesului de formare a viitorilor profesori (pr)	Pearson Correlation	-.061	-.102	.728**	1.000	-.141	-.088	-.096	-.160
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.470	.228	.000		.095	.300	.258	.058
	N	141	141	141	141	141	141	141	141
competente de contextualizare a pregatirii teoretice dobandite (st)	Pearson Correlation	-.071	-.130	-.032	-.141	1.000	.608**	.048	.055
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.362	.124	.684	.095		.000	.535	.516
	N	168	141	168	141	168	141	168	141
competente de contextualizare a pregatirii teoretice dobandite (pr)	Pearson Correlation	-.026	.069	-.126	-.088	.608**	1.000	.059	-.044
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.764	.417	.137	.300	.000		.486	.605
	N	141	141	141	141	141	141	141	141
competente de consiliere a viitorilor profesori (st)	Pearson Correlation	-.012	.020	-.031	-.096	.048	.059	1.000	.684**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.879	.817	.691	.258	.535	.486		.000
	N	168	141	168	141	168	141	168	141
competente de consiliere a viitorilor profesori (pr)	Pearson Correlation	.064	.005	-.143	-.160	.055	-.044	.684**	1.000
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.450	.955	.091	.058	.516	.605	.000	
	N	141	141	141	141	141	141	141	141

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Correlations at the level of the four categories of competences of the pedagogical practice mentoring teacher

By the statistic data processing, the conclusion that the difference between the average of students' scores vs. the average of mentoring teachers' scores is negligible as to the perceptions on the mentor's competence profile was reached.

After the confrontation and correlation of the perceptions of the two fundamental categories of actors involved in the performance of the pedagogical practice activity (*i.e.*: students and mentoring teachers) the preparation of a competence profile of the mentor was resorted to, corresponding to all their expectations and needs.

Such competence profile was put into relationship with the professional roles of the pedagogical practice mentor, in compliance with the table below:

GENERAL COMPETENCES	SPECIFIC COMPETENCES	PROFESSIONAL ROLES AND RELEVANT ACTIVITIES
I. MANAGERIAL COMPETENCES	**1.1. Competences related to the planning of the pedagogical practical internship**	• Identifies the essential steps of an action plan for the pedagogical practical internship • Schedules the pedagogical practice activity according to the program of university courses or other variables • Plans observation activities and the activities related to the takeover of didactic roles
	1.2. Competences related to the monitoring of the pedagogical practical internship performance	• Timely prepares the management of the application school, the teachers staff and the pupils for receiving the students who are in the pedagogical practical internship • Concludes the pedagogical practice conventions on term • Observes the conditions and obligations stipulated in the pedagogical practice convention • Permanently controls the performance of the pedagogical practice activities • Intervenes *with diplomacy* for correcting the mistakes/clumsiness of practicing students • Monitors the finalization of all the pedagogical practice activities on the established terms, according to the action plan • Applies questionnaires for the registration of pupils' perceptions on the pedagogical practical internship • Applies questionnaires for the

		registration of students' perceptions on the performance of the pedagogical practical internship • Performs a SWOT analysis on the pedagogical practical internship
	1.3. Competences related to the management of the educational groups involved in the pedagogical practice process	• Offers examples for the stimulation of pupils' cooperation and creativity (in a group and individually). • Suggests/proposes different work modalities with pupils during didactic and extra-didactic activities; • Offers pedagogic solutions for the possible tensions /conflicts which occurred at the level of the "school class" group • Applies sheets for noticing pupils' behavior during the lessons taught by practicing students • Applies sheets for noticing the behavior of the group of students assisting in the final/trial lesson of their colleague • Analyzes the information collected by means of such sheets for noticing behaviors.
II. PSYCHOSOCIAL COMPETENCES	**2.1. Interpersonal competences**	• Analyzes the information collected by means of such sheets for noticing behaviors • Ensures the cohesion of the group which is initiated in the professional behavior field • Expresses an open attitude and flexibility in relation to students • Proves sensitivity as to the learning experiences and needs of the practicing students • Observes individual differences • Manifests an empathic attitude • Is assertive and tolerant
	2.2. Communication and relationship competences	• Offers (verbal, non-verbal) communication models and a good relationship with pupils (in group and individually); • Uses different levers to make the didactic communication more efficient • Identifies the potential sources of

		dysfunctionality of communication processes • Negotiates and mediates conflict or risk situations which may occur at a certain time.
III. COMPETENCES RELATED TO THE COUNSELING of future teachers	**3.1. Competences related to the psycho-pedagogical counseling of practicing students**	• Plans hourly intervals in which he/she counsels practicing students • Offers himself/herself as a resource for learning the professional behavior • Creates opportunities to learn the *teacher* behavior • Provides support in the didactic projection of lessons, in the filling out of the pedagogical practice notebook, of other sheets necessary to pedagogical practice activities • Facilitates the access of practicing students to the use of different didactic materials necessary for holding certain lessons • Explains to the practicing students the importance and manner to fill in the pedagogical psycho-social sheets: the pupil's sheet, the sheet of the pupils' class; • Analyzes along with the students the lessons taught for finding the ways to optimize future activities;
	3.2. Competences related to the facilitation of the transfer of the skills related to the counseling of practicing students to the pupils	• Offers examples of psycho-pedagogical counseling of pupils and settlement of conflict situations • Suggests/recommends different modalities of intervention in the process related to the school and professional orientation of pupils
IV. COMPETENCES RELATED TO THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF the acquired theoretical preparation	**4.1. Competences related to students' familiarization with the school/organizational context**	• Facilitates the insertion of students in the school application unit • Facilitates the access to the organizational culture of the school, to school documents and other work instruments of the teacher etc.
	4.2. Competences related to the practical transposition of	• Assists the student in drafting the project of a didactic activity according to the situational coordinates of its performance

| | specialty and methodical theoretical accumulations | • Offers models for the organization and performance of different types of lessons
• Proposes versions to perform and/or improve a didactic activity
• Provides students with feed-back on their own manner of performing certain didactic activities
• Measures the students' individual performance level according to competence standards
• Communicates and comments his/her notes on the activities performed by each student based on the professional competence standards known by the students from the very beginning of the pedagogical practical internship
• Adopts a supportive attitude in evaluative role moments
• Encourages self-evaluation as a form of self-reflection on own activity
• Drafts, with professionalism, analysis reports on the students' activities |

Table 3. Competence profile of the mentoring pedagogical practice teacher

The results of the investigation were considered relevant for the initiation of a program for the continuous training of pedagogical practice mentors. The curriculum of the training program was drafted according to the conclusions of the performed research, being structured as follows:

:	Mandatory disciplines	Number of hours				Credits
		course	practical activ.	evaluation	Total	
1.	Psychosociopedagogy of communication relations	4	6	1	11	3
2.	Management of pedagogical practice activities quality	4	6	1	11	3
3.	Psychosociology of the educational group	4	6	1	11	3
4.	Quality standards in pedagogical practice	4	6	1	11	3
5.	New trends in curricular	4	6	1	11	3

	designing					
	Optional disciplines 1					
1.	Methods and techniques to evaluate the pupil's personality	3	6	1	10	2
2.	New trends in evaluation theory and practice	3	6	1	10	
	Optional disciplines 2					
1.	Differentiated education	3	6	1	10	2
2.	Current teaching orientations	3	6	1	10	
	Final evaluation				4	
	TOTAL CREDITS					20

Table 4. Curriculum related to the training of mentoring pedagogical practice teachers

The program related to the training of mentors was accredited by CNFP under the denomination of "Training of Pedagogical Practice Trainers" by decision no. 116 of August 29, 2007.

In the 2007-2009 period, the program was performed by 819 members of the technical staff (415 teachers, 272 masters, 132 educators).

The follow-up activities organized by the DPPD in the last school year revealed a visible improvement of the mentoring activities performed in the application schools it collaborates with.

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